

## U.S. intelligence clash over Backfire bomber

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**A** DIFFERENCE of intelligence opinion in America on whether the new Russian supersonic bomber Backfire is a strategic bomber with inter-continental range, means Russia will win a battle in the next round of Strategic Arms Limitation Talks.

The bomber is now likely to be excluded from the 2,400 strategic delivery vehicle limit, agreed during the Ford-Brezhnev Vladivostok SALT talks. Russia has 80 Backfires and is rapidly building more.

The Russians maintain it should not be considered as a nuclear strategic delivery vehicle because it has not the range. Thus, Russia insists they should be allowed 2,400 other delivery vehicles.

They say the bomber has only

intermediate range with nuclear weapons and is not able to strike at American mainland targets and return to the Soviet Union.

### Directors disagree

Mr Noel Firth, director of the Office of Strategic Research of the CIA, disagrees, as does Mr George Bush, the agency's director.

But Mr Edward Proctor, CIA's deputy director, says: "So far Backfire has been deployed to bases that have been used for the medium bomber. Therefore we assume that the initial deployment is for the same kind of mission—peripheral and anti-shipping."

American and RAF intelligence agree although Britain has no say in SALT talks, that the bomber has inter-continental capability in the nuclear role. But it appears that the American State Department is supporting the Russian contention.